

Chamba Painting



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CHAMBA PAINTING

M. S. RANDHAWA



LALIT KALĀ AKADEMI
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Chamba Painting

NAMED after a fair princess, and reminiscent of a tree with fragrant flowers, Chamba is situated in the heart of north-western Himalayas. Jammu and Kashmir is to its north-west, Lahaul towards east and Kangra to the south-east and south. Running through Chamba from south-east to north-west are the three mountain ranges of the Himalaya, the Main Himalaya, the Pangi Range, and the Dhauladhar, separating respectively the water sheds of the rivers Chenab, Ravi and Beas. It was once the seat of an ancient Hindu kingdom founded in the middle of the 6th century which maintained its existence till A.D. 1947 when it was absorbed in the union territory of Himachal Pradesh along with other feudal States of the Punjab Hills.

The ancient capital of the state was Brahmaur, earlier known as Brahmapura, in the upper Ravi Valley which still has a number of ancient temples, some built by the ruler Meru Varman (c. A.D. 680). The town of Chamba, situated on the Ravi, derives its name from Champāvati, a daughter of Rājā Sahila Varman (c. A.D. 920) in whose honour her father built the Chamasni temple. On account of its situation in a remote and inaccessible part of the Himalaya, Chamba escaped the iconoclasm of the Muslim invaders. Hence ancient Hindu temples in their pristine beauty can still be seen in this city. Its most conspicuous feature is the large open space, the *maidān*, which is a public park, a parade ground, and a market place. Fringing it is a row of shops. Higher up is the new palace of the Rājā, a sprawling white building, gleaming in the sun. Interspersed among the houses and shops are the old temples including the Lakshmi Nārāyaṇa built by Sahila Varman. At the back of the city is the old palace, the Rang Mahal, adorned with frescoes in various stages of decay. Fortunately a number of them have been rescued and brought to the National Museum in New Delhi.

The people of Chamba, particularly the Gaddi women, are known for their good looks. We perhaps see a reflection of the beauty of these enchantresses in some of the Chamba paintings.

The Rājās of Chamba bore the suffix of Varman up to the middle of the sixteenth century, and the last monarch with such a name was Pratāp Singh Varman (A.D. 1559), a contemporary of Akbar. It was during his reign that Chamba became a tributary of the Mughal empire. Prithvī Singh (A.D. 1641-1664) visited Delhi during the reign of Shāh Jahān, and it is said that on account of his good looks was even seen by the ladies of the harem.

The collections of Hill Rājās have a particular importance in the study of provenance and style of paintings. No doubt most of the collections with the Rājās are mixed and along with paintings which were painted in the particular State there are others too which were acquired as dowries, gifts or by purchase. By a careful study, however, it is possible at times to find out which paintings belong to the local school. While the Rājās' collections in most of the Hill States have been dispersed, Chamba was fortunate in preserving its art heritage more or less intact. Rājā Bhuri Singh, an enlightened prince, donated his entire collection for a museum named after him at Chamba in September 1908. The museum was



Fig. 1. Prithvi Singh of Chamba (A.D. 1641-1664),
Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

In the account which follows, I have taken into consideration the research into Chamba painting which has been done so far. A visit to Chamba in March 1960 proved particularly fruitful. It provided an opportunity of examining the collection of paintings in the Bhuri Singh Museum and also some important private collections of the old families of Chamba. Amongst the latter, two bear the names of artists, and these were subsequently purchased by Jagdish Mittal of Hyderabad who has been very kind to lend some examples from his collection for reproduction in this monograph.

Painting in Chamba can be divided into four distinct phases, viz. Basohli (A.D. 1720-1764), Guler-Chamba (A.D. 1770-1808), Sikh (A.D. 1820-1850) and a revivalist phase during the middle of the nineteenth century. Portraits of Prithvi Singh (A.D. 1641-1664), Chattar Singh (A.D. 1664-1690), and Umed Singh (A.D. 1748-1764) in primitive hill style are in the

Bhuri Singh Museum and have been reproduced by Karl Khandalavala in his study *Pahārī Miniature Painting*. Khandalavala believes that the portraits of Prithvi Singh and Chattar Singh are not contemporary. This conclusion seems to be correct. On my visit to the Bhuri Singh Museum in 1960 I found that these three paintings are possibly by the same artist who painted the portrait of Umed Singh. All three have heavy black and red borders and the pigments used are similar. I reproduce the portrait of Umed Singh which may be dated c. A.D. 1760 (Fig. 2). A comparison with the portrait of Umed Singh with that of Prithvi Singh (Fig. 1) shows that they are identical with some changes made in the design of cushions and carpets.

I. BASOHLI PHASE (c. A.D. 1720-1764)

What is the evidence of the existence of painting in Chamba in the early eighteenth century? A portrait of

invariably decorates the side face of the women. The faces of male and female figures have a remote resemblance to Mughal painting. That is why Goetz calls them Mughal-Basohli. The treatment of clouds and water is very individual. It is surprising that mountains are not shown in these paintings. The last painting of the series showing Kṛishṇa installing Ugrasena as king of Mathura, bears an inscription in Takri, which according to Vishwa Chander Ohri¹ indicates that this series was painted by Lohru, a carpenter, for Miān Shamsheer Singh, younger brother of Rājā Umed Singh, and completed on 9th February, 1758. Some of the artists in the Kangra Valley were also carpenters by caste, and hence there is nothing unusual when we see an artisan working as an artist. A painting from this series, in which Kṛishṇa and his companions are demanding toll from cowherdresses is reproduced as Fig. 3.

It is very likely that the early style prevailed in Chamba from about A.D. 1725 in the reign of Ugar Singh to the close of A.D. 1764 when Umed Singh died. If this were so one should presume that the



Fig. 3. Dāna-līlā. An illustration to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Chamba, A.D. 1758, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

¹ *Lalit Kalā*, No. 11, 1962, p. 60. Khandalavala had ascribed them to the mid 18th century on stylistic grounds in *Pahārī Miniature Painting*, Bombay 1958.

be later than A.D. 1720. Painting in the new style was done on a large scale for Govardhan Chand from A.D. 1743 onwards.

Who were the artists who created the new style of painting? It has been established that the best series of Kangra paintings were the products of a family of artists who were descendants of Pandit Seu, viz. his sons Māṇak and Nainsukh and their descendants. Several members of this family belonged to Haripur-Guler, and from there some members migrated also to other States. Nikkā, a son of Nainsukh, settled in village Rajol, Taluka Rihlu, in the reign of Rāj Singh of Chamba. Rihlu was under the suzerainty of the Rājās of Chamba at that time. According to Goswamy, who refers to a settlement record, Nikkā is described as from Guler.¹

There is a painting 'Rāj Singh Watching a Dancer' in N. C. Mehta collection, now in the Gujarat Museum at Ahmedabad, in which he is depicted as a beardless youth, hardly fifteen years of age. Rāj Singh (A.D. 1764-1794) was born in A.D. 1755, and was only nine years old when he became Rājā of Chamba. So the painting must have been painted about A.D. 1772. Khandalavala states that the famous Ushā-Aniruddha series of Chamba paintings (Pl. XI) can be attributed to Rām Lāl, and he believes that it is Rām Lāl who painted the portrait of young Rāj Singh to which we have already referred. Now this Rām Lāl was the fourth son of Nainsukh. Hence it is interesting to find that Nikkā and Rām Lāl were working for Rāj Singh at Chamba. Rāj Singh was a contemporary of Prakāsh Chand of Guler (A.D. 1773-1790) who had a wife from Chamba. Hence there is a strong evidence of cultural links between the States of Guler and Chamba which led to the development of painting at Chamba.

The earliest mention of Chamba painting is by the traveller Ujfalvy, a Frenchman of Hungarian descent who met Rājā Shām Singh of Chamba in A.D. 1881. "The Raja of Chamba showed me a number of miniatures which depict the history of his ancestors, and which are unparalleled in the freshness of their colouring and the delicacy of execution,"² observes Ujfalvy. He obtained some paintings from the Rājā, six of which he describes and reproduces in the account of his travels.

Ujfalvy left a particularly interesting description of Rāj Singh with his Rānī Naginu of Bhadarwah in the garden of Rajnagar, which is now in the Louvre, Paris. Rajnagar palace was erected in A.D. 1755 during the rule of Umed Singh and had a Mughal Char-Bagh with two pavilions. It was destroyed in A.D. 1775. Describing the painting, Ujfalvy writes, "The third picture: the prince has married, his beard has grown longer, his face is more expressive. Wrapped in a splendid garment of silk, and bejewelled with gold, pearls and precious stones, he is about to leave the terrace with his young wife for a stroll in his highly geometrically laid out garden. In his right hand he holds the stem of his hooka, wrapped golden thread, and carried before him by a charming slave girl. With the left hand he tightly clasps his young wife.

¹ *Roopa-Lekhā*, Vol. XXXV, p. 17. According to Goswamy, the entry in the settlement record of A.D. 1868 is as follows : "In the reign of Raja Rai Singh of Chamba, the founder, Nikka having migrated from Guler territory, settled down in this Tirka and occupied the lands named herein after bringing them under the plough with the permission of the then ruler."

² Goswamy, "The Traveller Ujfalvy and Pahari Painting," *Roopa-Lekhā*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 13.



Fig. 6. Rāj Singh of Chamba with his Rānī and infant Jit Singh.
Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

embroidery technique to Rajput designs, first appeared during the rule of Rāj Singh. The art was an importation from Kangra and Basohli. In one of these is shown the wedding of Jit Singh with Princess Śārādā of Jammu, and has been dated A.D. 1783 by Goetz.

Patronage of painting which was started by Rāj Singh was continued by his successor Jit Singh (A.D. 1794–1808). Jit Singh was only nineteen years of age when he ascended the *gaddi*. His first concern was the neighbouring State of Basohli whose rulers periodically attacked Chamba. In A.D. 1800 Jit Singh invaded Basohli, and defeated Bijai Pāl the ruler. He, however, acted generously and restored the conquered territory on payment of a war indemnity.

Though no building of any importance was constructed during his reign he patronised artists. Rām Lāl, Chhaju and Harkhu were his principal artists. The favourite themes of these artists, apart from portraiture, were Keśavadāsa's *Rasikapriyā*, Bārāmāsā from the *Kavipriyā*, Bihārī's *Sat Sai* and the romance of Aniruddha and Ushā.

The paintings of a fine Aniruddha-Ushā series are now partly in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, and partly in the Punjab Museum (Pl. X), Chandigarh. Those in the Punjab Museum were acquired by me from Miān Nihāl Singh who belongs to the royal family of Chamba. According to Khandalavala, another Aniruddha-Ushā series, now in the National Museum, New Delhi, was painted at Chamba by the artist Rām Lāl (Pl. XI). Rām Lāl was the fourth son of the famous artist Nainsukh. These paintings are characterised by delicate naturalism and brilliancy of colours. The female figures are exquisitely beautiful and are characterised by a gliding grace and aristocratic elegance.

III. THE SIKH PHASE (A.D. 1820–1850)

Charhat Singh (A.D. 1808–1844) was only six years of age when he succeeded his father Jit Singh. The administration was carried on by his mother Rānī Śārādā with the assistance of Wazir Nathu, a wise and able administrator, who is still remembered with affection by the people of Chamba. In A.D. 1809

full face, light complexion, good profile, and a large eye, a somewhat heavy expression, and a weak and drawling voice. Zurawur Singh is not so corpulent as his brother, with very handsome but inexpressive features, and was always splendidly dressed, a la Sikh, with a chelenk of rubies and emeralds worn on the forehead, over the turban. He allowed me to draw his profile, but pretended that he did not care about having it taken, and I could never persuade him to sit quiet. The Rajah was more complaisant; he sat like a statue, and was so pleased with his own likeness, that I was obliged to present it to him, and make another for myself. After I had succeeded tolerably with poor Bir Singh, I handed the drawing to Cherut Singh for his inspection, who, upon seeing the long, melancholy face of his Quizote-looking brother-in-law



Fig. 8. Rājā Charhat Singh with his Rānī watching *sārus* cranes. Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

portrayed upon paper, was wholly unable to check a disposition to laughter, and burst into a long-continued chuckle, in which all regard for Oriental gravity and decorum was quite forgotten.

“He passes his time very monotonously, devoting a great part of every morning to his puja, or Hindi worship; then follows the breakfast; and then the long siesta. He then gives a short attention to business,

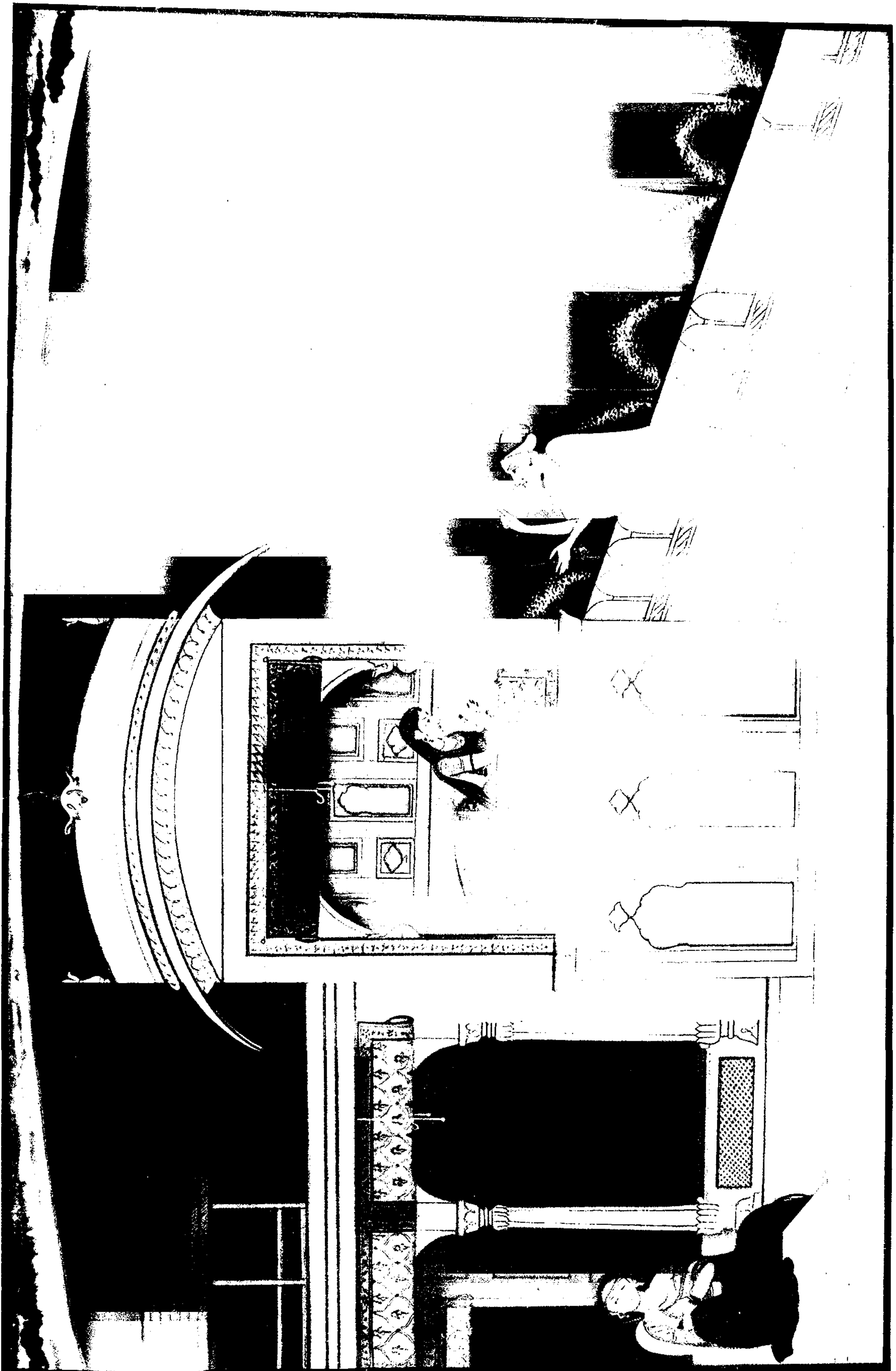
can also be attributed to Tārā Singh. The female facial formula shows a striking resemblance with the figures in the *Rāmāyaṇa* series.

Tārā Singh died in 1871 and with him, it seems the tradition of miniature painting in Chamba also came to a close. There are portraits of Śrī Singh and Gopāl Singh (A.D. 1873–1904) by Narotam, an artist of Mandi, in oils which may be attributed to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover the craft of photography had by then usurped the main work of artists, viz. portraiture, and the old tradition of miniature painting which involved patient hard work came to an end for lack of appreciation and patronage.

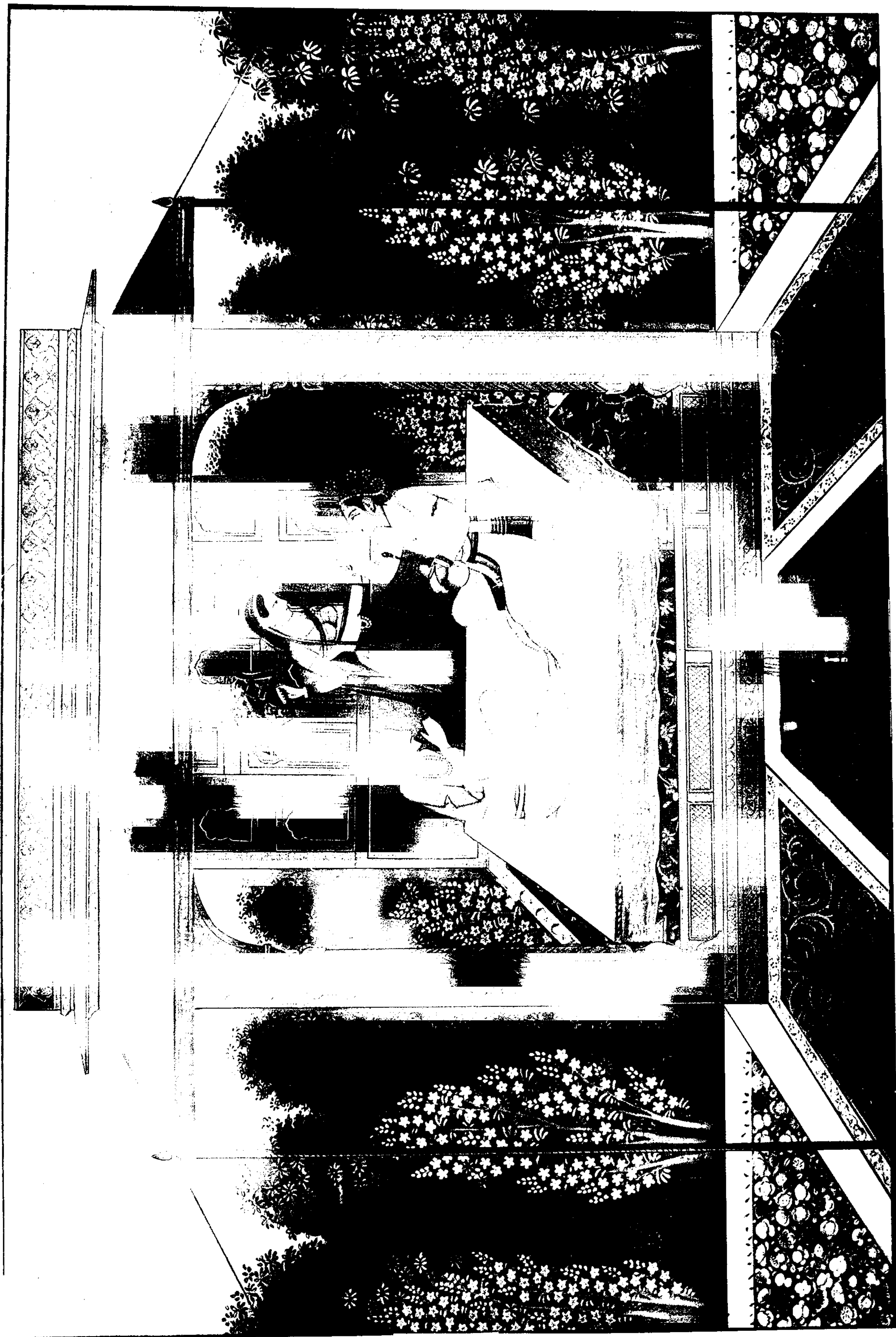
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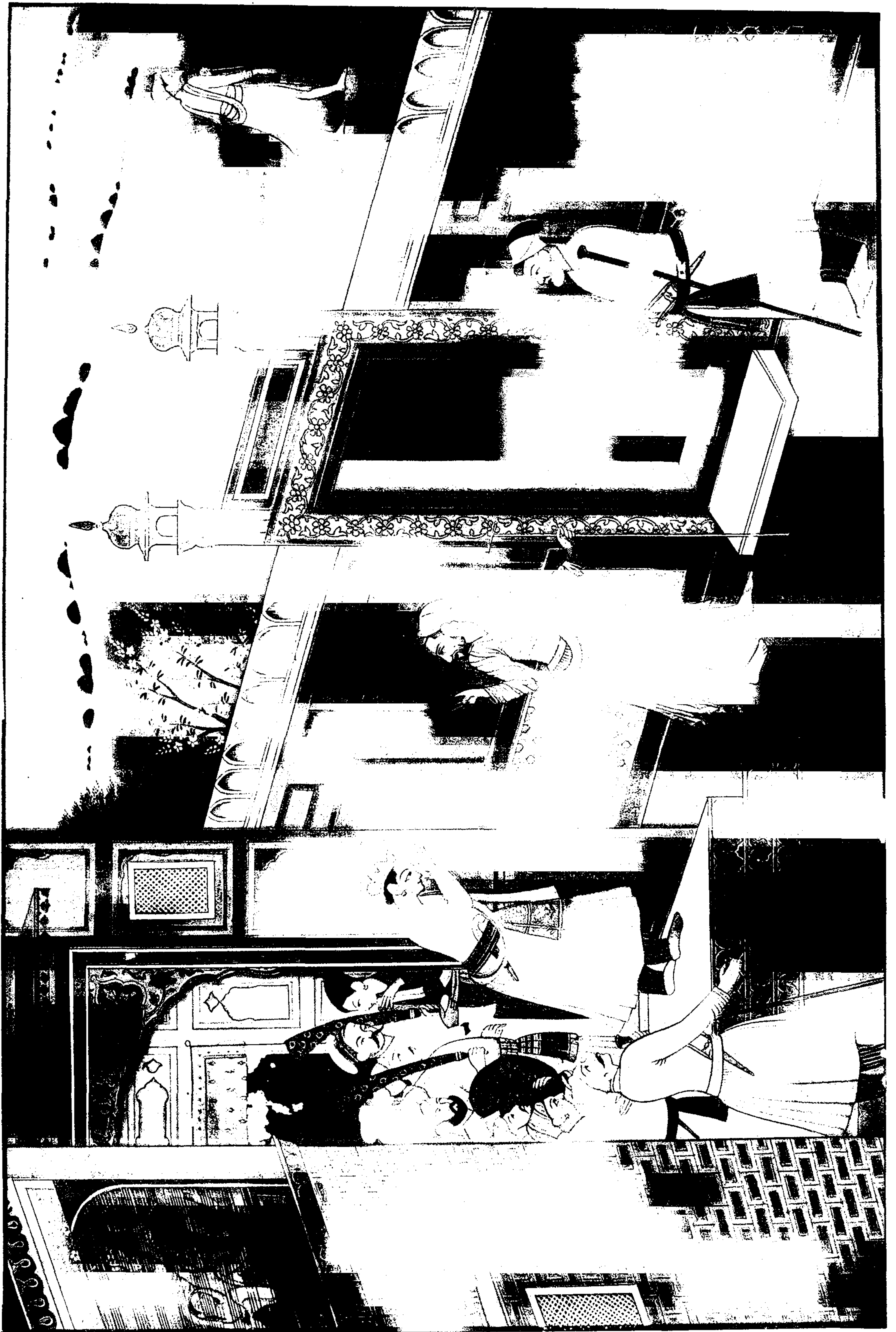
















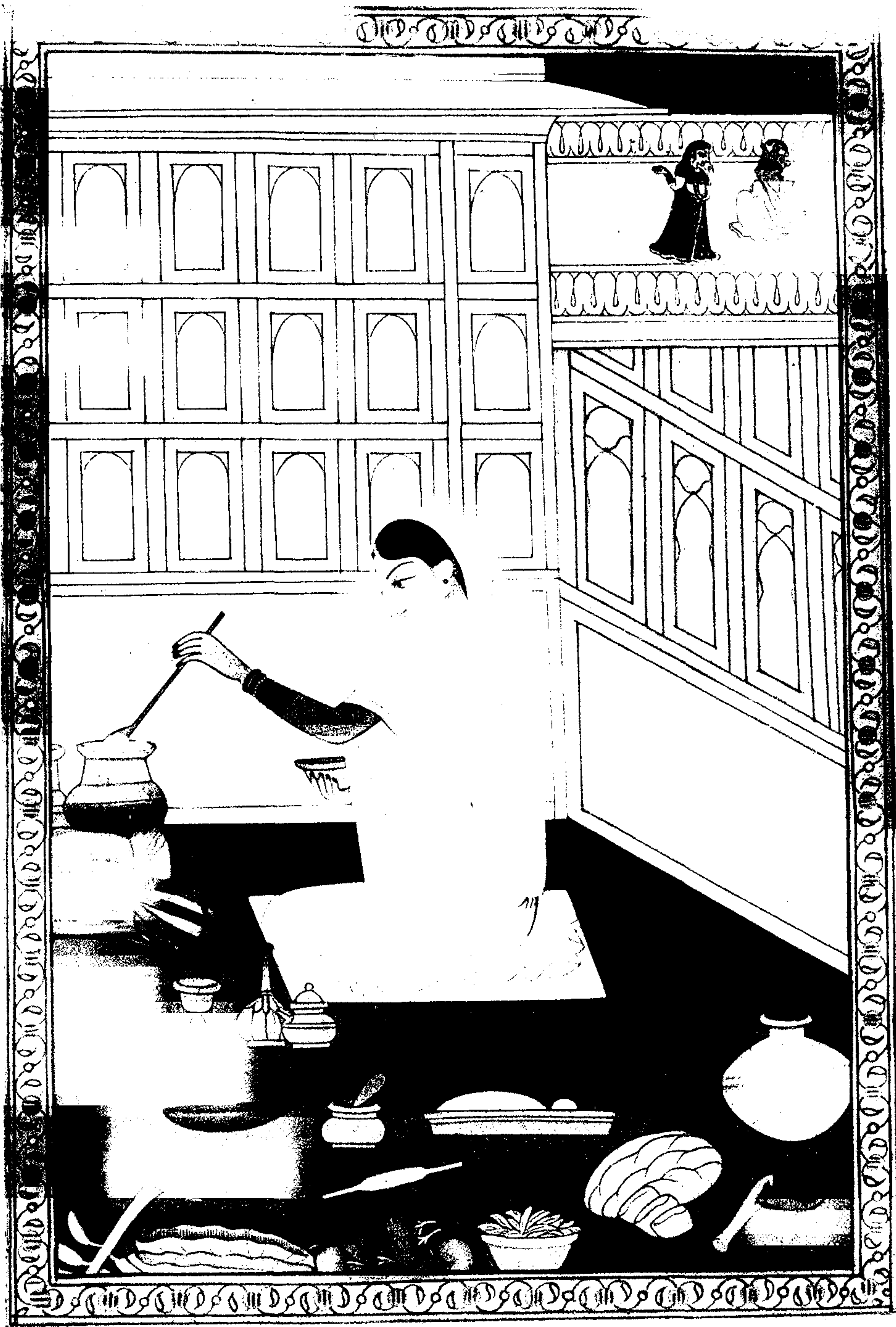






PLATE VIII. THE MONTH OF ASOJA (*ĀŚVINA*)

From a *Bārāmāsā* series. Chamba, circa A.D. 1800. Attributed to the artist Chhaju.
Collection of Jagdish Mittal, Hyderabad. Same size.

In the month of Āśvina which follows the rains, the atmosphere is clear, the sky is blue and the air is cool. This painting is attributed to the artist Chhaju, who was the son of Rañjhā, also called Rām Lāl, and nephew of Nikkā. In the background is a temple of Devī with Brahmins worshipping. Along the wall of the palace is a clump of plantains. In the courtyard the *nāyikā* is imploring the *nāyaka* not to leave the home in the delightful month of Āśvina. It illustrates the following poem of Keśavadāsa from the *Kavipriyā*:

*“The spirits of the ancestors come, propitiate them,
The past rushes to my brain! my love!
Householders worship the Durgās nine,
for success in life and salvation beyond.
The kings accompanied by the pandits,
set out on tour to see their lands.
The skies are clear, the lotuses in bloom,
the nights are illuminated by the moon,
Lord Vishṇu and His consort Lakshmī,
are lost in their dance celestial.
In the month of Āśvina, the season of love,
why leave the home, why make me sad?”*¹

¹ Randhawa, *Kangra Paintings on Love*, New Delhi 1962, pp. 142, 143.

PLATE X. ŚIVA AND PĀRVATĪ BATHING

From an Aniruddha-Ushā Series. Chamba, *circa* A.D. 1805.
Punjab Museum, Chandigarh. Same size.

Bāṇāsura, a powerful demon king who ruled in the town of Śoṇitapur was a devout worshipper of Śiva. Śiva granted him a thousand arms. He began to tear up mountains and trees, but the irritation of his arms did not cease and he could not endure their strength. He went to Śiva and asked him to point out some powerful person with whom he may fight. He wanted to fight with Śiva himself. Śiva told him not to be impatient and gave him a banner to set up over his palace. When his enemy would come who would fight him, the banner would break and fall of its own accord.

After some years a daughter was born to his chief queen Bāṇāvatī. She was given the name of Ushā. When Ushā was seven years old she was sent to Kailāsa to be instructed by Śiva and Pārvatī. Apart from book learning Ushā also began to play all musical instruments. On hearing Pārvatī and Ushā singing and playing on the lute, Śiva also felt the pangs of love. Taking Pārvatī with him he had a bath in the Ganges, and embraced her affectionately. Ushā gazing upon the happiness and affection of Śiva and Pārvatī felt a desire for a husband with whom she could also sport. This is the scene depicted in this painting. Śiva and Pārvatī are bathing in the river, while Ushā and her companions are looking at them with a feeling of yearning. In the background the Nandi bull, the vehicle of Śiva, and the tiger, the vehicle of Pārvatī are dozing in front of a bonfire.

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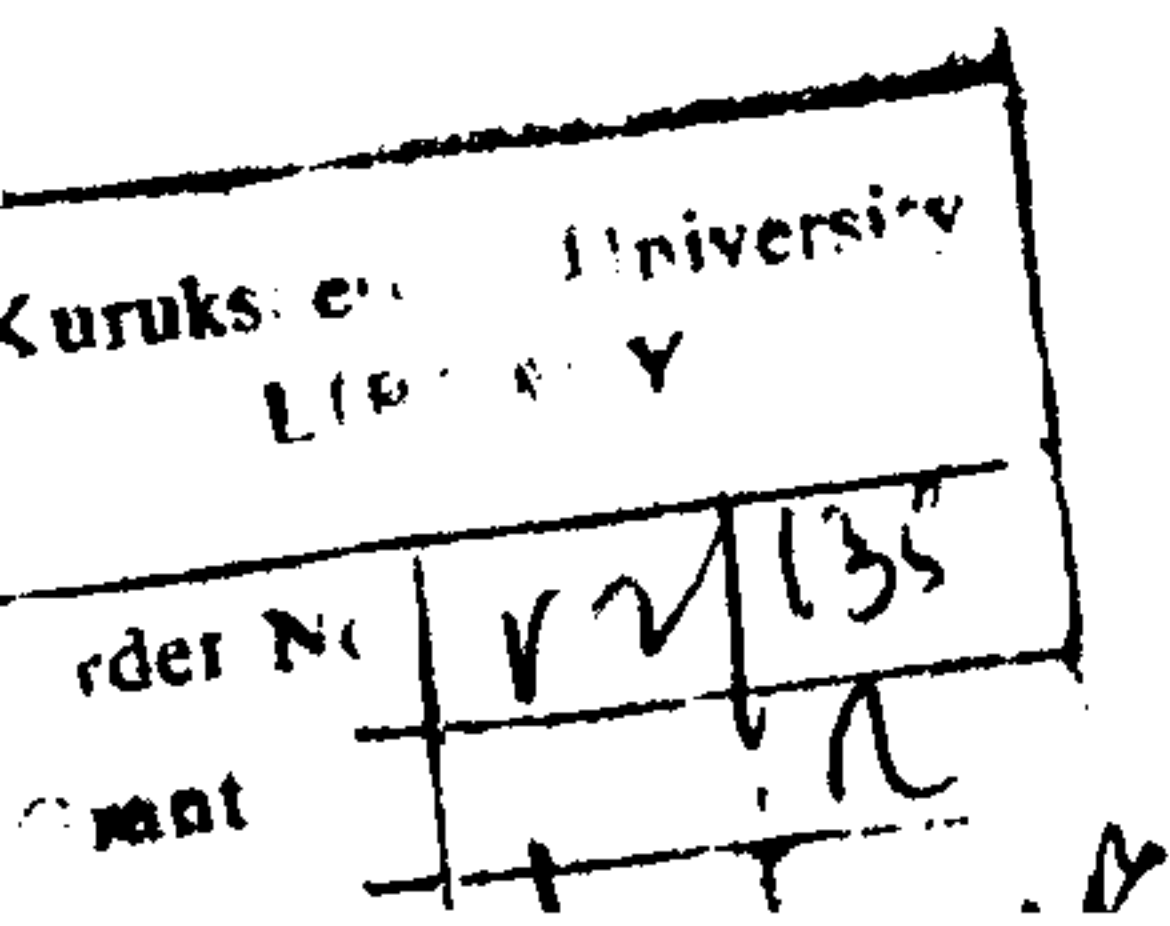


PLATE VII. THE EXPECTANT HEROINE (*Vāsakasajjā Nāyikā*)

Chamba, circa A.D. 1800. Attributed to the artist Harkhu.

Collection of Jagdish Mittal, Hyderabad. Same size.

Ashṭa Nāyikā or the 'Eight Heroines,' the eight-fold classification of *nāyikās*, has provided a delightful theme to Pahārī artists. In this lovely painting, the Chamba artist Harkhu, portrays *Vāsakasajjā Nāyikā*, the expectant heroine. She waits for her lover seated on a bed of leaves covered with jasmines. In the background is a mango tree clasped by a *Mādhavī* creeper whose blossom-laden branches dangle over the *nāyikā's* sylvan retreat. In front is a lotus pool. The night is studded with stars. A timid doe is drinking water from the pool. One can almost feel the silence of the night.

The eulogy of Kothi Sarāhan in Chamba given below was composed by a grief-stricken husband to commemorate his beloved wife who was known for her beauty. How aptly it applies to the demure *nāyikā* of this painting:

"She, exceedingly lovely and rich in virtue, attained by the cunning disposition of various ornaments still greater charm in the eyes of men of taste, like the muse of a good poet.

Can she be the high tide of the ocean of passion, or a cluster of blossoms on the tree of love, or the presiding goddess of the realm of king Spring, or the sum of the beauty of the three worlds?

Her cheeks of a very pale hue full of essence of beauty and loveliness, capable of causing delight to the night-lotuses which are the eyes of her admirers.

Her lip is not equalled by the ruby, though endowed with a like redness; for the one partakes of hardness and has no moisture, the other is soft-shaped and nectar-distilling.

Her slender arms are soft like lotus-stalks; her pair of breasts high and watered with charm, appear like a castle of Kāma.

*Her lotus-like hands, possessing the ruddy appearance of young buds, remain expanded in the brightness of her moon-like face causing amazement among the people."*¹

¹ Vogel, *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba*, pp. 48, 49.

organised by Dr. J. Ph. Vogel. Paintings were added to the Rājā's collection by purchase from various places in the Kangra Valley by Vogel, but it is known which of the paintings belong to the Rājā's collection. Vogel published a carefully prepared catalogue and in Section D thereof the paintings are catalogued with brief descriptive notes. In the catalogue two portraits, one of Rājā Rāj Singh, and the other of Rājā Jit Singh and his Rānī Śārādā are reproduced in monochrome.¹

Coomaraswamy does not say much about painting in Chamba. In his pioneer study *Rajput Painting*, he frankly states, "I regret, however, that I cannot speak with authority about the painting of Chamba." It may be inferred from various considerations that it is intermediate in character between the Jammu Dogra styles and the more polished schools of Kangra.² As we will see later this was rather wide off the mark. In his *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Part V, Rajput Painting*, he has nothing significant to add.

O.C. Gangoly in his portfolio entitled *Masterpieces of Rajput Painting* described a number of paintings from Guler as belonging to the school of Chamba. These included a portrait of Prakāsh Chand, Rājā of Guler.

Another scholar who took interest in Chamba painting is W. G. Archer. In his *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills*, referring to Rāj Singh's victories over the forces of Jammu (A.D. 1775), Basohli (A.D. 1782), and Kashtwar (A.D. 1786), he mentions, "Such triumphs must obviously have deeply impressed the other states and it would not be impossible, if drawn by his expanding power and influence, certain Guler artists migrated to Chamba, taking with them the Guler style."³

The problem of painting in Chamba also attracted the attention of Hermann Goetz.⁴ From his study of sculptures and wooden panels of Kothi Brahmor in Chamba State, now in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, he attributed them to A.D. 1670 during the reign of Chattar Singh (A.D. 1664-1690).

Karl Khandalavala comprehensively discussed the problems of Chamba painting in his *Pahārī Miniature Painting*. He discounts the view expressed by Hermann Goetz that painting was practised in Chamba in the reign of Prithvī Singh (A.D. 1641-1664). He reproduced a portrait of Udai Singh of Chamba (A.D. 1690-1720). He believes that the portraits of Jai Singh and Sakhat Singh, sons of Prithvī Singh, were painted during the rule of Ugar Singh (A.D. 1720-1735) and Dalel Singh (A.D. 1735-1748). He also reproduces a number of paintings from Chamba and corrects wrong ascriptions of paintings from Chamba by earlier scholars.

Hermann Goetz provided a comprehensive review of art in Chamba in a paper entitled *The Art of Chamba in the Islamic Period*. Apart from paintings he also gives valuable information about temples, palaces and gardens of Chamba, and also about pictorial embroidery known as Chamba *rumāls*.⁵

¹ Vogel J. Ph., *Catalogue of the Bhuri Singh Museum at Chamba*, Calcutta 1909, Pls. IV and V.

² Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting*, Vol. 1, London 1912, p. 20.

³ Archer, *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills*, London 1952, p. 44.

⁴ Goetz, "The Basohli Reliefs of the Brahmor Kothi A.D. 1670," *Roopa-Lekhā*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, 1954.

⁵ Goetz, "The Art of Chamba in the Islamic Period," *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, XI, 1962.

PLATE XI. USHĀ'S DREAM

An illustration to the romance of Ushā and Aniruddha.

Chamba, *circa* A.D. 1775. Attributed to the artist Rām Lāl.

National Museum, New Delhi. Same size.

Ushā grew up into a beautiful maiden. Now she was constantly thinking of her future husband. She saw Aniruddha, grandson of Kṛishṇa, in a dream and fell in love with him. As she wanted to embrace him, she woke up and was much distressed. This is the scene shown in this delightful painting attributed to the artist Rām Lāl. The anxiety of the maid-servant at the distress of Ushā is depicted in a dramatic manner.

Ushā's friend Chitralkhā, daughter of her father's minister, asked her the cause of her trouble. When told, she painted the portraits of all the gods, demi-gods, *asuras* and men. Among them Ushā recognised Aniruddha, grandson of Kṛishṇa, and asked her friend to bring him to her. Then Chitralkhā went to Dwaraka and carried Aniruddha, who was sleeping, to the palace of Ushā. Ushā carried on her romance with Aniruddha secretly. Her secret, however, was discovered and news reached Bāṇāsura. At the same time the banner of Śiva dropped and Bāṇāsura read the meaning of the inauspicious omen. The palace was surrounded and Aniruddha was captured and thrown into prison.

On learning the fate of his grandson, Kṛishṇa attacked Śonitpura. Śiva came to the assistance of Bāṇāsura and was defeated by Kṛishṇa. After a long battle Bāṇāsura was also defeated but his life was spared. Kṛishṇa brought Aniruddha and Ushā in his chariot to Dwaraka where they lived happily.

A comparison of Plates X and XI indicates that separate sets of the Ushā-Aniruddha story were painted by different artists.

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Fig. 2. Portrait of Umed Singh of Chamba.
(A.D. 1748-1764), Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

Ugar Singh (A.D. 1720-1735) has been reproduced by Archer in *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills* (Fig. 54) which he dated A.D. 1730. Archer, however, ascribes it to Jammu. In A.D. 1735 Chamba town was burnt down by Ugar Singh to thwart his rival Dalel Singh. Goetz believes that the paintings in the early style must have been burnt in that fire.

There is a series of paintings of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in a style which is peculiar to Chamba, and which has not been seen elsewhere in the Punjab Hills. In these paintings the crowns of the trees are pyramidal and the sky is bluish grey, and the ground yellowish green. The cattle are painted in the Basohli manner, and the cowherds with peaked caps and drawers also resemble their counterparts in Basohli paintings. The borders of the paintings are deep red, another characteristic of Basohli paintings. A lock of hair

PLATE VI. SUDĀMĀ TAKES LEAVE OF KṚISHṆA

Chamba, A.D. 1780-1790.

Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. Size 29.5 × 20.2 c.m.

Next morning Sudāmā took leave of Kṛishṇa. In this painting Kṛishṇa is seen bowing to departing Sudāmā and the ladies of the palace are peering through a curtain watching the scene. As he was going along towards his home he was pondering over the situation. He did not make any request to Kṛishṇa, lest he may regard him as avaricious. He was wondering how he would explain the matter to his wife who would be disappointed over the fruitless journey.

On reaching home he found a palace standing on the site of his hut. Inside he saw his wife wearing fine clothes and ornaments. Now he realized that it was hardly necessary to make a request to Kṛishṇa who knows the desires of every individual.

The undulating green hills with a light yellow wash at the top, and the way trees are painted are Guler characteristics which we see in this magnificent painting. The picture is in two parts, the left half shows the regal affluence of Kṛishṇa in his gilded palace, and the right half the simplicity of nature and the stark poverty of Sudāmā clad in rags.

portrait of Ugar Singh referred to as painted in Jammu by Archer was in fact painted at Chamba. This style continued during the rule of Umed Singh, who is described as 'a just ruler and an able administrator' by Vogel. Umed Singh also began the construction of the Rang Mahal, a garden palace.



Fig. 4. Salvation of Ahalyā by Rāma. An illustration to the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Chamba, circa A.D. 1765, Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba.

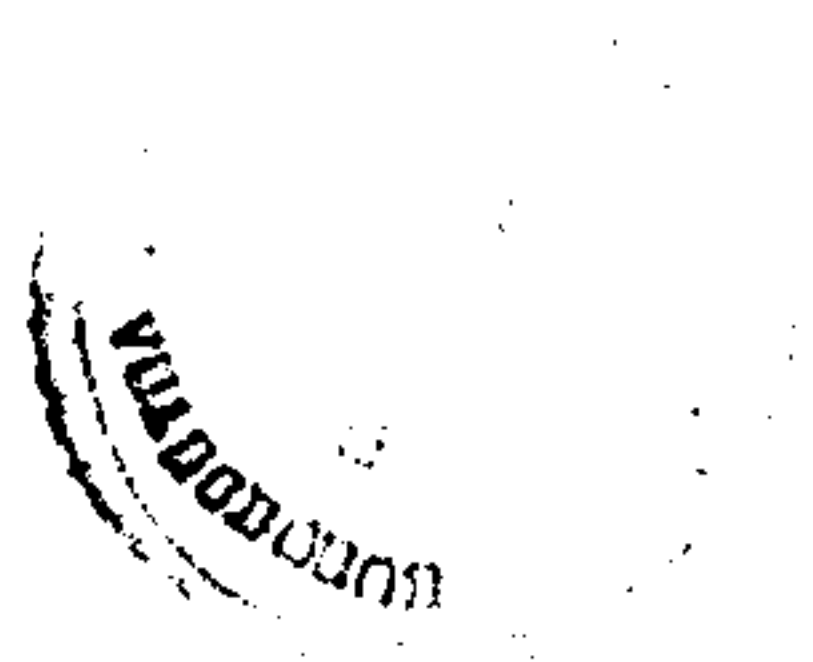
A series of *Rāmāyaṇa* paintings with clouds shown in the form of spirals, and characteristic treatment of the crowns of trees is more refined than the series of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It may be attributed to the last years of the reign of Umed Singh, viz. A.D. 1760–1765. A painting from this series is reproduced as Fig. 4.

II. GULER-CHAMBA PHASE (A.D. 1770–1808)

Though the issue is controversial several writers are of the view that the earliest centre of painting in the Kangra style was Guler. Artists must have been practising at Haripur-Guler during the rule of Dalip Singh (A.D. 1695–1743), if a note in the *Daliparañjanī* dated A.D. 1703 which refers to their presence, is correct. Moreover, portraits of Dalip Singh in half-Mughal, half-Guler style exist, and these can hardly

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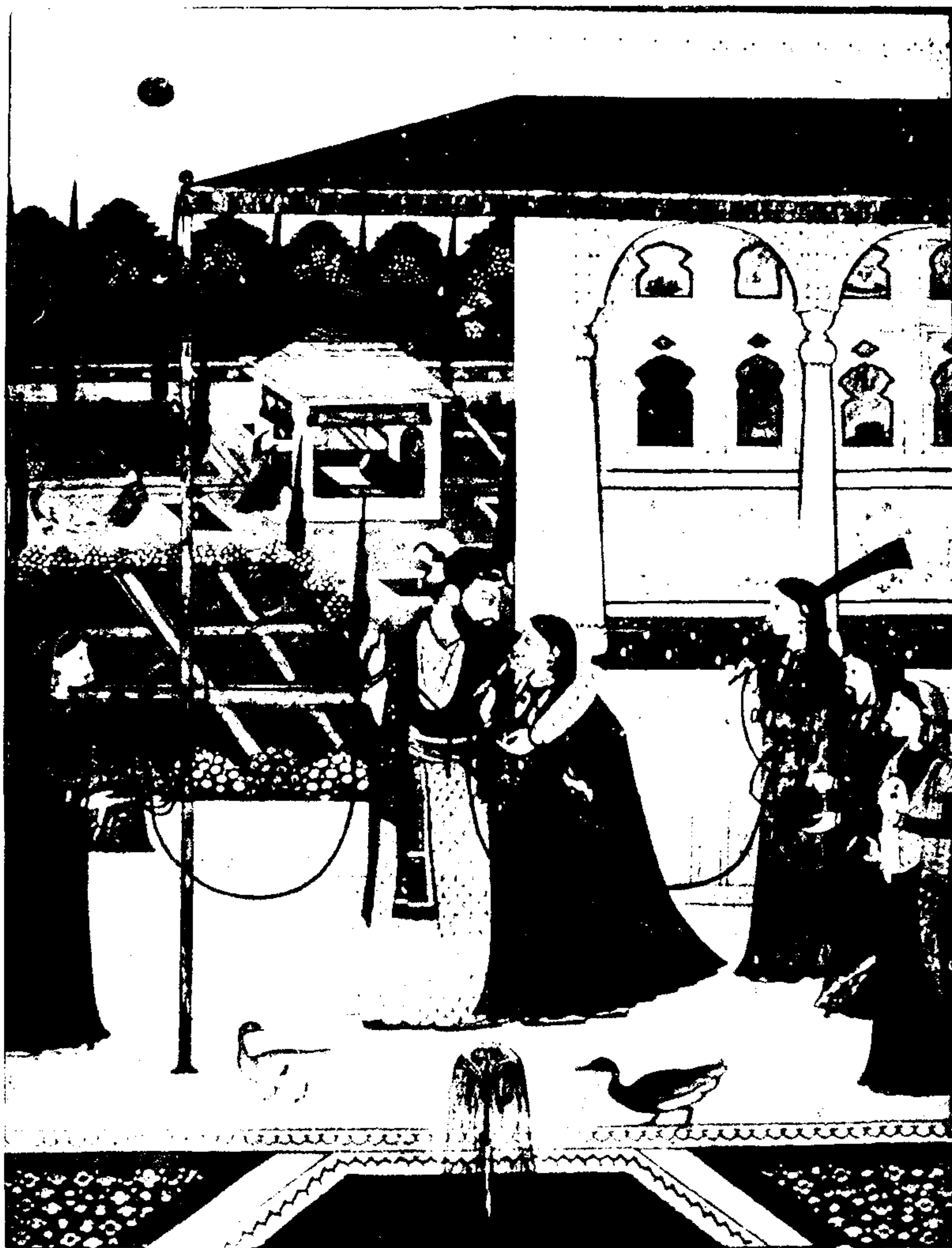


Fig. 5. Rāj Singh with his Rānī in the garden of Rajnagar. Louvre, Paris.

One can hardly think of anything more moving or charming than this twosome lovingly clinging close together and gazing into each other's eyes."¹ This painting has been reproduced by Archer in his *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills*, Fig. 34, and has been dated c. A.D. 1790 by him. It is a tender painting and can be regarded as one of the masterpieces of Chamba-Guler painting. The conventions of the Guler artists, viz. cypresses alternating with mangoes, poppies in the parterres, and the characteristic female facial formula, are seen in this painting. It is likely that it may have been painted by Nikkā (Fig. 5).

In his earlier portraits, Rāj Singh has a closely trimmed pointed beard as in Plate I. In another painting in the collection of the Bhuri Singh Museum, in which he figures only with his Rānī from Bhadarwah, his appearance is similar (Fig. 6). In his later portraits Rāj Singh has a long flowing beard.

The embroideries called Chamba *rumāls*, which, according to Goetz, is an application of Afghan-Persian

¹ Goswamy, "The Traveller Ujfalvy and Pahari Painting," *Roopa-Lekhā*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 15.

PLATE V. KṚISHṆA EATING RICE BROUGHT BY SUDĀMĀ

Chamba, A.D. 1780-1790.

Sudāmā was a poor Brahmin who was Kṛishṇa's school mate. He was living in abject poverty in a dilapidated thatched hut, and he and his wife were clad in rags. His wife advised him to seek the help of his friend Kṛishṇa, who was living in regal luxury at Dwaraka. As a gift for Kṛishṇa she tied a little rice in a piece of cloth. Carrying the packet of rice Sudāmā arrived at Dwaraka. It is thus the *Prema Sāgara* describes the city of Dwaraka: "All around the city is a very lofty rampart, in which are four gateways, in which are gold-inlaid and jewel-studded panels; and within the city are glittering gold, silver and jewel-studded, five-storeyed and seven-storeyed palaces, so high that they conversed with the clouds, the spires and pinnacles of which are brilliant as lightning. Various coloured flags and standards are fluttering; from windows, casements, apertures and lattice-work, fragrant odours are emanating; at each door are placed posts of sprouting plantain, and golden vessels filled; garlands and wreaths are suspended, and in every house joyful instruments are sounding; in various places, stories, legends and conversations about Hari are going on; the eighteen castes are dwelling in ease and happiness; and the discus called Sudarśana protects the city."¹

Sudāmā ultimately reached the gilded, jewel-studded palace of Kṛishṇa. As soon as he entered the palace Kṛishṇa descended from the throne, embraced him, seated him on the throne and washed his feet. Then they talked of their school days, when once they spent a stormy night with torrential rain under a tree.

Sudāmā was concealing his humble present, when Kṛishṇa noticed his embarrassment. Seizing the packet from under his arms he avidly ate two handfuls of rice. Here Kṛishṇa is shown eating the rice and Rukmiṇī who is in attendance is fanning him and Sudāmā.

What followed is shown in Plate VI.

¹ Pincott, *The Prema Sāgara*, p. 158.

Chamba, along with other Hill States, became a tributary of the kingdom of Ranjit Singh. Nathu had friendly relations with Mahārājā Ranjit Singh, and this was of great advantage to the State of Chamba which was saved from exorbitant levies. Now painting in Chamba enters the Sikh phase. It lacks that freshness and charm which it possessed during the rule of Rāj Singh and Jit Singh. It became heavy and stolid as is evident from the portrait in which Charhat Singh is shown smoking and listening to music. It generally reflects the character of the patron who was a dull person, who never travelled beyond his domain, and spent most of his time in *pūjā* or in the harem.



Fig. 7. The Joy of Rains. State Museum, Lucknow.

Vigne, the English traveller met him at Chamba in A.D. 1839. His brother Zorāwar Singh and brother-in-law Bir Singh, the unfortunate Rājā of Nurpur, were with him at that time. Vigne has left a lively account of Charhat Singh and his associates and also describes the daily routine of the Rājā.

“Cherut Singh, the Rajah of Chamba, is now, I should think, about forty-six years of age, for thirty of which he has been upon the *gadi* (royal cushion). He is not tall, and is inclined to corpulency, with a

and afterwards he and his brother ride up and down the green, upon an elephant, between two other, in the centre of a line of a dozen well-mounted horsemen. The Rajah is said to be a good man; but his subjects, as is generally the case in the East, are much robbed and oppressed by his superior officers. His Vuzir, Nutu, much celebrated throughout the country for his superior sagacity and wisdom, died about seven years ago, and was a great loss to his master.”¹

Though we may dismiss the bulk of painting of Charhat Singh's period as dull and crude, occasionally we see some charming specimens as in Fig. 7. Here we see monsoon clouds decorated by skeins of *sārus* cranes. The lady swinging surrounded by her maid-servants, two of whom are playing music, and another pushing the swing, all convey to us the feeling of joy which we in India feel at the advent of the monsoon. This painting has a mood and charm which pervades the atmosphere, and which we share. There is a charming painting of Charhat Singh sitting in a balcony watching rain clouds and pointing towards a flight of *sārus* cranes (Fig. 8).

There is another painting of Charhat Singh and his Rānī listening to music in a garden. It is a night scene in a garden crowded with plantains and mangoes. Though the line is feeble, the colour is glorious, a wonderful soft blue, reminiscent of a Japanese print of the finest period, observes French.²

A number of murals were painted in the Rang Mahal under the patronage of Charhat Singh. In one of them Charhat Singh alone with his ancestor Umed Singh and their Rānīs and ministers are adoring the *liṅga*. In another young Charhat Singh is performing *pūjā* before an idol.

IV. REVIVAL OF THE CHAMBA STYLE

A revival of the Chamba style took place during the rule of Śrī Singh (A.D. 1844-1870). The Rang Mahal was completed and murals in the Akhand-Chandi palace were retouched in oil. A battle scene in which a British army is shown resisting an onslaught of Indian cavalry is the most notable in this palace.

A battle scene from the *Mahābhārata* occupies a whole wall. An execution scene shows a criminal being trampled by an elephant. Another shows a fight between two rhinoceroses watched by a *rājā* and his attendants sitting in a gallery. There are some sporting scenes showing Englishmen in top-hats hunting bears, pig-sticking, and shooting wild buffaloes with pistols from horseback.

Apart from wall painting with genre themes, a genuine revival of the old Chamba style took place during the rule of Śrī Singh. A local artist named Tārā Singh painted a *Rāmāyaṇa* series. Tārā Singh makes profuse use of chocolate brown pigment. The foliage of the trees follows the Garhwal pattern and flowering creepers cover the crowns of trees. The facial formula is a derivative from the earlier Guler-Chamba style.

A series of *Bārāmāsā* paintings in the Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba, with profuse use of chocolate brown

¹ Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir and Ladakh*, Vol. 1, London 1842, p. 157.

² French, *Himalayan Art*, London 1931, p. 45.

PLATE IV. HUMILIATION OF RUKMAṆA

From a Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa Series.

Chamba, A.D. 1780-1790.

Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. Size 32 × 20.9 c.m.

Kṛishṇa reached Kundalpur, the capital of Bhīshmaka, where preparations were going on for the marriage of Rukmiṇī with Śiśupāla. Balarāma followed him with a large army of the Yādavas. Rukmiṇī was despairing of the success of her messenger's mission, when he came and informed her of the arrival of Kṛishṇa. Rukmiṇī arrived at the temple of the Devī with an escort. Having perambulated round Devī, "that moon-faced one, of the colour of the champak blossom, with eye like a deer, voice like the cuckoo, gait like an elephant, taking her friends, being in anxiety about meeting Hari, was about to depart,"¹ says the *Prema Sāgara*. Kṛishṇa seated in his chariot, arrived where all the warriors attendant on Rukmiṇī were standing. On seeing Kṛishṇa, the guards became confounded and their weapons dropped from their hands. Kṛishṇa seized Rukmiṇī and lifted her on his chariot. Rukmaṇa pursued Kṛishṇa with an army. Kṛishṇa cut down all the weapons which Rukmaṇa discharged at him. He attacked Kṛishṇa with a club. Kṛishṇa seized him and was about to kill him. On the behest of Rukmiṇī he spared his life, but asked his charioteer to tie his hands behind his back. In the meantime Balarāma, who had defeated the army of Asuras, also arrived on an elephant, and requested Kṛishṇa to release his brother-in-law who had suffered enough humiliation. This is the scene shown in this painting. The curved hill with a light yellow wash at the top is a convention of Guler artists. Both these paintings (Plates III and IV) are of excellent quality, and are very likely the work of Nikkā, who was one of the best artists of Prakāsh Chand of Guler and later on of Rāj Singh of Chamba.

¹ Pincott, *The Prema Sāgara*, London 1897, p. 167.

PLATE I. PORTRAIT OF RĀJ SINGH OF CHAMBA

Chamba, *circa* A.D. 1785.

Collection of Jagdish Mittal, Hyderabad. Same size.

Rāj Singh was one of the most renowned rulers of Chamba, and the rise of painting in the Guler-Chamba style was due to his patronage. He was born at the garden palace of Rajnagar in A.D. 1755, and was only nine years of age when he became Rājā of Chamba. His early years were full of troubles, and taking advantage of his minority, his neighbours, the Rājās of Kangra and Basohli, annexed portions of his territory. When he came of age Rāj Singh retaliated. In A.D. 1782 he conquered Basohli. In A.D. 1794 Mahārājā Sansār Chand of Kangra demanded from him the surrender of Rihlu, a fertile tract of land in the Kangra Valley. A battle took place at Nerti where Rāj Singh was killed. While alive Rāj Singh's prayer to Chāmuṇḍā Devī was that he may die on the battlefield. His prayer was granted. At the spot where he fell a temple was erected by his son Jit Singh, where a fair is held every year on the anniversary of his death.

Rāj Singh married the daughter of Sampat Lāl of Bhadarwah. In this portrait he is shown seated on a carpet holding a hawk. In front of him is his infant son Jit Singh seated in the lap of the wazir. This is a splendid portrait of Rāj Singh which reveals his character, viz. firm determination and indomitable courage.

PLATE III. MESSAGE TO KṚISHṆA

From a Rukmiṇī-Haraṇa Series.

Chamba, A.D. 1780-1790.

Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. Size 33.3 × 22.1 c.m.

In Chapters LIII and LV of the *Prema Sāgara* the story of Kṛishṇa and Rukmiṇī is narrated. Bhīshmaka, a king of Vidarbha, had five sons and a beautiful daughter Rukmiṇī. Hearing the praises of Kṛishṇa's valour from the bards, Rukmiṇī decided to marry him. Her eldest brother Rukmaṇa on the other hand wanted to marry her to Śiśupāla, king of Chanderi. Rukmaṇa prevailed upon his father to fix a day for the marriage. Rukmiṇī was greatly perturbed on hearing this. She sent for a Brahmin and gave him a letter to be delivered to Kṛishṇa in which she invited him to carry her off on the day of her marriage when she would pay a visit to the temple of the Devī. In this painting Rukmiṇī, who is seated in the balcony, is giving her message to the Brahmin. The Brahmin delivered Rukmiṇī's letter to Kṛishṇa at Dwaraka and he agreed to fulfil her wish. What followed is related in the note to Plate IV. The mango trees alternating with cypresses is a familiar convention of Guler artists. The red background is unusual and heightens the anxiety of the heroine in the drama of passion.

PLATE II. RĀJĀ JIT SINGH OF CHAMBA WITH HIS RĀNĪ

Chamba, *circa* A.D. 1800.

Bhuri Singh Museum, Chamba. Size 26.7×21.6 c.m.

Jit Singh (A.D. 1794–1808) was a keen patron of the art of painting. In this painting Jit Singh is seated in a pavilion overlooking the river Ravi. Opposite him is his wife Rānī Śāradā. In attendance are splendidly attired maid-servants, one holding a fly-whisk of peacock feathers, another a *huqqā* with a long trailing stem, and the third a gold tray with betel leaves. The fourth dressed in yellow clothes is waving a *chaurī* of yak's tail over the Rānī's head. In front a fountain is bubbling and at its sides are poppies growing in parterres. A pair of ducks in playful mood interposed between the fountain and the pavilion conveys feelings of love, and creates a mood which pervades the atmosphere. If we compare the facial formula adopted for women with the *nāyikā* in Plate VIII we notice a marked resemblance. It seems this painting too was painted by Chhaju, who was the grandson of Nainsukh.

PLATE IX. THE RADIANT DAMSEL

An illustration to Bihārī *Sat Sai*. Chamba, circa A.D. 1810.

Collection of Jagdish Mittal, Hyderabad. Same size.

The *Sat Sai* of the Hindi poet Bihārī was a favourite text with Pahārī artists. A series of paintings of the *Sat Sai* by Kangra artists is in the collection of Mahārājā of Tehri-Garhwal. The Chamba artists also painted a series based on the verses of the *Sat Sai* out of which we reproduce this painting which illustrates the following verse of Bihārī:

Taṭkī dhoī dhovatī, chaṭkīlī mukh jot
Lasat rasoī ke vagar, jagar magar dutī hot.

Clad in a newly washed garment, the *nāyikā* is cooking;
The kitchen is shining with the radiance of her lovely face.¹

Sitting in a corner, the *nāyikā*, clad in a white *sārī*, is stirring lentils in a boiling pot. Her jet black tresses reach her waist, and her face is serene and beautiful. Scattered around her is a bundle of firewood, a pitcher of water, a basket containing vegetables, piles of brinjals and lotus leaves, a bunch of plantains and cooking utensils. In the background Kṛishṇa is seated on a terrace, while the female messenger is describing to him the charm of the *nāyikā*'s face.

¹ Randhawa, *Kangra Paintings of the Bihārī Sat Sai*, New Delhi 1966, p. 46.

